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Facilitating Learning Experiences through a Class Pioneer Day

Fourth-grade student Misha (all names are pseudonyms) said, "[Pioneer Day] helps students understand the past in a fun way." When Mrs. Carr started teaching at Richards Elementary School the three fourth grade teachers decided to have a Pioneer Day where they would dress in period clothing. They moved their chairs outside under a tree for a pioneer school and went across the street to the church yard to do activities under the trees. When Mrs. Carr moved to Parkside Elementary School the parents had the reputation of being very involved especially with the sixth-grade curriculum including the trinity of events: Cave day, Greek Olympics, and the Renaissance Faire. When Mrs. Carr suggested that she wanted to do a Pioneer Day she had a windfall of parent support. It started small and simple but over time the number of volunteers grew.

Over the years, Mrs. Carr has been successful in working with parents to create meaningful experiences. How does this collaboration between teachers, parents, and students help the students learn civic skills? The teachers and parents model collaborating to create an environment where students learn about the past. The parents brought people they knew including relatives and experts from the community and created the pioneer day. The parents started working in January to make the pioneer day happen in May. The pioneer day occurred on the school grounds unless inclement weather drove them inside. During the pioneer day students clustered in small groups and a parent led them from station to station. At each station an activity occurred.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning provides a platform for students to learn when they research, make presentations about individuals, and place them in context of a branch of government or a grassroots; as opposed to students learning that one person works in isolation (Jesuit & Endless, 2018, Brown & Silvestri, 2014). Local activists engage many people to change convention. Students replicate discrete experiences from the past through experiential learning in dance, music, folk tales, or traditional craft. Each event helps students to understand why the people in the past had a different experience with life. As students engage in lived experiences, they create knowledge that helps them to interpret the events where they have recently participated. Another example of the power of experiential learning is when students created a history museum to learn inquiry (O'Brien & White, 2006). Learning opportunities demonstrate possible life examples and applications where life consists of multiple rituals as part of daily, weekly, or yearly participation. Students participate in rituals prior to adulthood. Students

interpret how communities celebrate significant occurrences and events while they interpret those events.

Educators through reenactments allow students to imagine what part of the past might have been like (Lo, 2018, Morris, 2018, 2012, 2009, Wright-Maley, 2018). Teachers try many different engaging strategies to help their students understand what life would be like in a different time. Teachers tried reenactment as a video game, virtual field trip, or an enactment experience (Breunig 2017, Michels & Maxwell, 2006, Roush, 2004, Turner 1985). Each example method had limitations and successes. Volunteers engaged in recreating reenactment situations understand the celebratory nature of the experience for the students. Each example had challenges in helping students have meaningful connections to civics instruction.

Students participated in the experience of enactive theme days to immerse themselves in the reenactment experience. The range of student experiences encompass civic, economic, geographic, and historic knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions. These experiences may take a variety of formats or content from international understanding, to Laura Ingalls Wilder, to India (Fenton & Gallant, 2016, Morris & Janische, 2003). Students find themselves in experiences from various places and times to learn more about the world and its people. Students become activists, protesters, and agitators in recreating leading people to liberty. The experience may ask students to role-play events from the Civil Rights movement (Ledbetter, Field, & Baumi, 2013). Students vicariously practice the finding their voice to call for civil rights. They may also find themselves in the same location, but back one hundred years learning lessons their great grandparents learned. A field trip to a day in a one-room schoolhouse also required students to act as if they were back in time (Coughlin, 2010). Mingling the aspects of public education with those foreign aspects of attempting to live in a different time calls for students to consider the continuities and differences in life from now to then. Student experiences with play helps them to see places where they might disagree with the people who lived in the past. The experience of drama added to the student experience in helping students understand other cultures in their play (Rosler, 2008). Many of these situations were where individuals, groups, or institutions disagreed while exploring controversial issues. Students could seek a compromise or a consensus in these situations. Civic conflict in the form of disagreement over procedures, practices, or ideas provide opportunities for students to practice engaging with controversy.

Students used negotiation skills to mediate situations in role playing experiences to ameliorate these situations. Role playing scenarios are usually both easier and safer than real environments. Students who desired to make a difference in the community exhibited the value of philanthropy (Merrey, Kus, and Karatekin, 2012). While holding altruistic values they may not act on them. The

tension between what a student believes and does may not occur to them unless a situation helps them to explore it. This is not different from adult experience prior to changing dispositions or adjusting their values. Similarly, despite what teachers valued their dispositions may indicate other methodologies practiced in conflict with their values (Bolinger & Warren, 2007). Their students may witness these conflicting messages. Student acted with the ideas they learned when they work through problems through using negotiation skills as an authentic forum for resolving issues (Serriere, 2014, NCSS, 2008). Mediating conflicts in public issues is an important skill in attempting to insuring a working democracy. They practiced working through personal issues, conflicts with groups, and political disputes. Students who possessed skills and tools in conflict resolution allowed them to navigate in democratic life. Multiple types of reenactment have been attempted. Reenactments presented opportunities for students to encounter knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions from other times and places. Some reenactments provided opportunities to prepare or participate in community life.

Procedure

Figure 1: Standards

Mrs. Carr referred to the NCSS C3 (2013) standards when planning her experiences for students.

D1.1.3-5. Explain why compelling questions are important to others (e.g., peers, adults).

D2.Civ.2.3-5. Explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation, and draw implications for how individuals should participate.

D3.2.3-5. Use distinctions among fact and opinion to determine the credibility of multiple sources.

D4.8.3-5. Use a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions about and act on civic problems in their classrooms and schools.

Student Preparation

The theme day was the culminating event of the yearlong investigation of state studies as part of the fourth-grade curriculum. Mrs. Carr needed to prepare her students for Pioneer Day, and prior to Lincoln's birthday, she read to them excerpts from *Abe Lincoln Gets His Chance* (Cavanah, 1959) and *Lincoln: A Photobiography* (Friedman, 1989). The students compare the treatment of the accomplishment of the president. The book by Cavanah was in dialect so the students heard how people from the period might have spoken. The book by Friedman has a more comprehensive explanation of the impact of Lincoln as an

adult. Both books have significant descriptions of life on the frontier. Mrs. Carr also reads excerpts from *American Grit: A Woman's Letters from the Ohio Frontier* (Foster, 2009). This edited collection of letters from the frontier show how a woman was engaged in her home and community. The students had to make decisions about how they wanted to prepare for Pioneer Day by selecting resources. The students had the options of reading *Daily Life in a Covered Wagon* (Erickson, 1997) *Conestoga Wagons* (Ammon, 2000), the *Bears of Blue River* (Major, 2009), or *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 2006). These fiction books about pioneer children in Wisconsin or Indiana explained what life might have been like. The information books about a covered wagon or Conestoga Wagon provided context for the journey across the land and living in a half-faced camp. The students concluded by reading sections from *Death by Petticoat* (Theobald, 2012). These short segments explored myths commonly told by uninformed docents at museums. Students read these passages to learn about how interpretation has changed and how people's thoughts about the past shifted across time. Moreover, they learned how they can be critical consumers of knowledge as they learn about the past.

The students did other projects earlier in the year which required them to role play, and they understood that for the theme day they would portray a student who lived in the 1830s. The student would need to make a decision and examine an issue to determine what they would do in the situation. Mrs. Carr (Personal Correspondence, April 10, 2017) said, "It was like being in a play without knowing the lines." Students knew their character based on their reading and had to apply their background knowledge to the experiences they had in the theme day. As the students became aware of the situation, they created the lines with their peers and the adults. By engaging in the topic together they determined what to do next.

Three weeks before the theme day, the students needed to have a conversation with their family about names their ancestors had or Biblical names that might be in their family. The students chose a character, selected a name, and the parent volunteers created a nametag for the student. This was important because Mrs. Carr needed to role-play with the students, and by looking at the nametag she could immediately determine how she was to address the students that day. At the same time, Mrs. Carr asked the students what they might wear and what they would bring for lunch. Mrs. Carr determined by asking these questions which students might need additional help in preparing for the theme day and could follow her initial contact with additional help or suggestions.

The students looked for free historic clothing to get in the spirit of the day. All students needed shoes and tennis shoes were popular even though the children of pioneers would have run barefoot in warm weather. A skirt from Mom, a long dress, or jeans and a flannel shirt made an acceptable outfit. As volunteers and

students outgrew pioneer clothes they occasionally donated to the school, and Mrs. Carr maintained a collection of multiple boxes of clothing so if people needed items, she had a reserve to help students. While the pioneer period was from 1800-1850 in Indiana the schoolhouse the students visited was in operation until 1900 so people could dress across the nineteenth century.

Figure 2: Parkside Pioneer Days Costumes

The time period of Pioneer Days is very broad, from statehood (1816) to turn-of-the century (1900). Here are some suggestions to get you going!

FEMALE COSTUMES:

Dress (from below the knee to ankle length)

Apron or pinafore

Long, dark or printed skirt (from below the knee to ankle length)

Light-colored, long-sleeved blouse

Bonnet, wide hair ribbon, dust cap, or straw hat

Knee length socks or long, white or dark stockings

MALE COSTUMES:

Dark, knee-length pants (created easily with dark sweats pulled to the knees) with socks

White or light-colored, long-sleeved shirt

Suspenders

Overalls or jeans

Plaid flannel shirt

Straw or wide-brimmed hat, or a plain cap with a small bill

Shoes must be worn and anything comfortable is acceptable, like gym shoes. Period shoes would include moccasins, boots, or work shoes.

Pioneer Day can be hot or cold, sunny or rainy, so plan for anything!

Students packed a pioneer lunch one day. They might have a hardboiled egg, bacon, ham, fried chicken, bread and butter, or strawberries if they were in season. Students had to make a real decision about what they would eat during the Pioneer Day and what they would take to school. As they talked about food Mrs. Carr talked about where food came from, and the students were very surprised to hear how it would be their job to wring the neck of a chicken. Some students decided not to take chicken in their lunch while other students compartmentalized this knowledge and enjoyed their chicken dinner.

Figure 3: Lunch at Simmons School 2017

Please plan and pack a lunch that would be typical of pioneer boys or girls! You can bring it in a small tin pail, a pan, a paper bag or a basket. You can

wrap a sandwich in waxed paper, a cloth towel or kerchief. Water and lemonade will be available at Simmons School for the students to drink. You might want to bring a tin cup. Students that don't bring a cup will be provided one.

The following items would have been found in a typical lunch at Simmons School:

- corn bread
- hard boiled eggs
- biscuits
- buttered bread (just a touch of white sugar for a treat!)
- apple butter or jelly bread
- cheese chunks
- seasonal fruits (berries, apples, pears, apricots)
- dried fruits (apricots, raisins, cherries)
- seasonal vegetables (tomatoes, carrots, celery)
- pickles
- fried chicken
- bacon
- cookies
- an orange or banana for a special treat!

Teacher Preparation

Dhrux (Personal Correspondence, April 15, 2017) said, "I learned how pioneers went to school and [how] they . . . play." When Mrs. Carr started students used dowel rods to write on paper grocery sacks. With over twenty-five years of teaching, Mrs. Carr has collected supplies to provide an educational Pioneer Day for her students. Carr collected feathers, and purchased metal pen nibs and India ink, marbles and jacks, and four ice cream freezers. She gathered sets of the game of Graces, sacks for races, and tug of war supplies. Her preparations for volunteers continue each year. When it worked like a well-oiled machine, she left records including a catalogue of former presenters in a binder for the next year.

Mrs. Carr served as the coordinator for the grade level and the parents to facilitate communication between the teachers and the parents. If different parents sent information into each of the four teachers details could become lost before the teachers would have time to coordinate. Since there were four classes of fourth grade students which was around 100 students Mrs. Carr was concerned about how much activity was too much and if the theme day would be too expensive. She met with one parent from each classroom and each person took a major task such as meal, stations, or nametags. Mrs. Carr formed fifteen-member groups for each twenty or forty-five-minute rotation.

Pioneer Day Example

To set the stage for the theme day one of the parents created a bulletin board to show the fourth-grade teachers, principal, and vice principal involved in pioneer activities and log cabin scenes. The parents decorated the fourth-grade hall with a wagon wheel and other pioneer items, and they erected a placard announcing Pioneer Day. This created anticipation for the annual ritual that the entire school in addition to the fourth-grade students could see. Other students could look forward to the event while some students looked back upon the event remembering their experiences.

Figure 4: Pioneer Day 1 Schedule

Time	Group	Activity	Leader Name	Location
8:00-8:10		Pass Out Nametags		
8:15-8:35	2 classes	Pioneer School		Simmons School
8:15-8:35 1 st Rotation	A	Pioneer Medicine		
8:38-8:58 2 nd Rotation	B	Ice Cream		
9:00-9:20 3 rd Rotation	C	Indoor Games		
9:25-9:50 4 th Rotation	A	Checkerboard		
9:50-10:25 5 th Rotation	B	Quill Writing		
10:25-10:48 6 th Rotation	C	Candle Dipping		
10:48-10:55		Restroom Break		
10:55-2:15	2 classes	Pioneer School		Simmons School
10:55-11:30	All Volunteers	Volunteer Lunch		
11:30-11:40	All Volunteers	Restroom Break		

11:40-12:00 1 st Rotation	D	Pioneer Medicine		
12:03-12:23 2 nd Rotation	E	Ice Cream		
12:25-12:45 3 rd Rotation	F	Indoor Games		
12:50-1:15 4 th Rotation	D	Checkerboard		
1:20-1:45 5 th Rotation	E	Quill Writing		
1:50-2:15 6 th Rotation	F	Candle Dipping		
2:15		Back to Classrooms		

The goal was to create hands on learning all day, and Mrs. Carr selected the activities and created eight stations per day. What happened depends each year on the skills of the parents who volunteered; a grandfather might have a collection of pioneer tools such as a crosscut saw. Of course, Mrs. Carr had materials and notes for certain activities that channeled the parents into making some decisions. In addition to the activity, parents tried to engage the students to think about how they would learn this skill or activity, how they would teach it to younger family members, and why it was important to the family. These conversations helped students see how they were part of a pioneer community.

Other school personnel also assisted for example, the art teacher helped the students learn scrimshaw one year. In other years the art teacher worked with a pioneer skill such as a stenciling or a stitching project. Some years students wove or created a sewing bag. The art teacher had the students design craft bags by stenciling them through rotation stations. Each item the students made went in the bag such as a checker set or a candle. At the end of the day the student name tag went into the bag and everything traveled home together.

The school cafeteria provided a special meal of something the pioneers might have eaten such as turkey and noodles or ham sandwiches. One mom was a chef and she brought in pioneer cooking including squirrel stew, pickles, and beets. Parents also brought in catered food such as a country ham, but all food came from commercial kitchens. The students ate outside under the trees and the parents set the pioneer tablecloths Mrs. Carr provided. The students also made and ate homemade ice cream. In addition to eating traditional food and recipes the students learned where their food came from and how it was prepared.

Figure 5: Parent Letter Pioneer Days 2012

January 2012

Dear 4th Grade Parents and Students:

The planning process has already begun for Pioneer Days! This year's events start Wednesday, May 16th with a square dance and other activities. On Thursday or Friday, students will travel to Simmons School in Hope, where they will role-play in a turn of the century classroom.

Pioneer Days allows students to experience what life was like in Indiana during the time of the pioneer settlers. A large part of making Pioneer Days a success is **volunteers!** We would like to start compiling names of volunteers who would like to assist during Pioneer Days activities. Volunteers are needed on May 16, 17 and 18th. We are hoping this advance notice will allow many of you to be able to check your calendars and volunteer to participate with your 4th grader.

Part of the Pioneer Days learning experience is being able to dress up as Pioneers! The costumes DO NOT need to be elaborate and can be created from your closets at home or borrowed from a previous Pioneer Days participant.

Students and volunteers are expected to dress as pioneers two days during Pioneer Days activities.

The Steering Committee is also looking for people who have an activity, talent or interest related to pioneer life (such as farming, animals, carpentry, cooking, quilting). If you or someone you know would be willing to share their talents with our students, please fill out and send back the form below to your child's teacher no later than February 10th, 2012.

We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to consider volunteering for this fun learning experience! If you have any questions, please contact any member of the Pioneer Days steering committee:

Volunteer name (teacher name) phone number email

Please complete and return to your child's teacher by February 10th, 2012.

Thank you!

Name _____ Student _____

Relationship to Student _____ Phone _____

Email _____

Child's Teacher _____

Pioneer related activity, talent or interest I can share with the students:

I WILL VOLUNTEER at Parkside for Pioneer Days:

_____ Wednesday, May 16th

_____ Thursday, May 17th (circle one) 8:00-11:00 teacher name; 11:30-2:30

_____ Friday, May 18th (circle one) 8:00-11:00 teacher name; 11:30-2:30

Animals were a very important part of Pioneer Day, and one of the volunteers brought in some of her goats. The volunteers and the students talked about what goat milk made, and every student got to milk a goat and a parent was there to take a photograph of it. The students got to take home a photograph printed in sepia tones, and in addition to petting a kid the students got to shear sheep. A wildlife rescue shelter brought in some animals to talk about how the pioneers interacted with their environment.

One of the parents becomes a pioneer doctor for a session with bottles of medicine, bandages, and folk remedies. One of the students had an amputation behind a screen, screams, and the doctor pretends to perform the surgery. Bloody, the doctor then goes to look in the mouth of student without washing his hands. Without a germ theory there was no incentive to clean between patients. Students had to make decisions about when they would see a doctor and when they would need to get better on their own. Since students did not agree on this they had to discuss with their peers how they would resolve this in their family.

Illustration 1: Being seen by the doctor at pioneer day.



In addition to meeting interesting volunteers the students had a variety of unique experiences. Daniella (Personal Correspondence, April 20, 2017) said,

"Playing with the handmade toys made me feel like a real pioneer." Students played pioneer games instead of regular recess, and a former student brought a spinning wheel to demonstrate textile production. Students made pioneer games including checkerboards from corn cobs or pieces of wood, and they made a buzz saw (a button on a string which spins noisily). In one station students did chores where students carried water, churned butter, carried firewood, or swept. Finally, a former teacher had a collection of antiques, and the students had to guess what the items were including: such items as a carpet beater or candle snuffer.

Figure 6: Pioneer Day 2 Schedule

Time	Group	Activity	Leader Name	Location
8:00-8:20	All Classes	Pass Out Nametags		Homerooms
8:20-8:35 1 st Rotation	A	Blacksmithing		Outside at West End of Building (Weather Plan – Harrison Room, Forum, 4 th Grade Classrooms)
8:37-8:52 2nd Rotation	B	Horses Goats		
8:54-9:09 3rd Rotation	C	Barn Raising		
9:11-9:26 4th Rotation	D	Quilting		
9:28-9:43 5th Rotation	E	Pioneer Music		
9:45-10:02 6th Rotation	F	Fur Trapping		
10:00-10:10	All	Restroom Break		
10:10-11:00	All	Square Dancing		
11:00-11:10	All	Organize By Class For Lunch		
11:10-11:30	All	Lunch		

11:30-11:50	All	Recess		
12:00-12:20 1 st Rotation	A/B	Tug-O-War Sack Races Graces		
12:20-12:40 2 nd Rotation	C/D	Tug-O-War Sack Races Graces		
12:40-1:00 3 rd Rotation	E/F	Tug-O-War Sack Races Graces		
1:15-2:05	All	Tomahawk Throwing Demo		
2:10-2:40	Back to Classrooms	Ice Cream (Bus riders first)		

Perils and Pitfalls

Working with parents to encourage them while not offending them was always tricky, and all ideas were not always good. One set of parents decided to make tin lanterns by freezing water in tomato juice cans and have the students pound nails into them. The best thing about this activity was that fortunately they removed the red juice first; otherwise, it would have looked like a blood bath. Some groups of parents wanted to do everything for the students rather than letting the students do it for themselves. Unfortunately, this decision making engaged in by the teachers and the parent volunteers is not made in front of the students, so they do not get an opportunity to watch it being modeled.

Of course, many other topics lend themselves to role-playing activities with elementary social studies. Teachers must be watchful that while they may address controversial ideas in the classroom, they never play out abuse with students. Dust bowl, home front, labor organization, women's suffrage, French explorers, and episodes from the American Revolution all provide content for reenactment.

Assessment

Since this was a culminating activity, students used multiple forms of assessment. Some of the assessment was traditional and used a rubric; however, other forms of assessment were summative and more performance based. The rubric assessed the ability of students to express why they study the pioneer period and identified who could and could not participate in democracy during the time period. Further, the teacher assessed the students with a rubric on their

ability to recognize facts and opinions from their readings about pioneers, identifies the problem of internal improvements at the time, and give proposed solutions.

Figure 7: Rubric

Benchmark	High Pass 4 Points	Pass 3 Points	Low Pass 2 Points	No Pass 1 Point
<p>D1.1.3-5. Explain why compelling questions are important to others (e.g., peers, adults).</p> <p>D2.Civ.2.3-5. Explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation, and draw implications for how individuals should participate.</p> <p>D3.2.3-5. Use distinctions among fact and opinion to determine the credibility of multiple sources.</p> <p>D4.8.3-5. Use a range of deliberative and democratic</p>	<p>Students list three reasons why they study the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify who could, who could not participate, and how they could participate in democracy during the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify three facts and three opinions in one of the books they read about pioneers.</p> <p>Students identify the problem of internal improvement in the pioneer period and</p>	<p>Students list two reasons why they study the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify who could participate and how they could participate in democracy during the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify two facts and two opinions in one of the books they read about pioneers.</p> <p>Students identify the problem of internal improvement in the pioneer period and tell two of the</p>	<p>Students list one reason why they study the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify who could participate or how they could participate in democracy during the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify one fact and one opinion in one of the books they read about pioneers.</p> <p>Students identify the problem of internal improvement in the pioneer period and tell one of the</p>	<p>Students list no reasons why they study the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students neither identify who could participate nor how they could participate in democracy during the pioneer period.</p> <p>Students identify one fact or one opinion in one of the books they read about pioneers.</p> <p>Students identify the problem of internal improvement in the pioneer period.</p>

procedures to make decisions about and act on civic problems in their classrooms and schools.	tell three of the proposed solutions.	proposed solutions.	proposed solutions.	
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One of the parent volunteers taking pictures of the students captured unabashed student joy, and the parent gave Mrs. Carr photos of their experience to send home with each student. Mrs. Carr surveyed the student as to what part of Pioneer Day they enjoyed the most and what did the students learn. Sara said, "We really would not want to carry wood. I learned a lot about how hard pioneers had life." While a lot of the experience was fun because it was novel the brutal realities of life on the frontier would not be fun all the time.

Since fourth grade had special classes first thing in the morning, the music teacher was good about helping the students find a partner for a square dance without embarrassing them. The students thanked their dance partner. She helped the students learn and practice a square dance six to eight weeks before the event, and on Pioneer Day the students performed the square dance as their first activity. Mrs. Carr invited the parents; many came to watch and take pictures. The parents assessed if their student learned about the culture of the early settlers from witnessing the students perform the dance.

Illustration 2: Square dancing at pioneer day.



Another assessment included the memory book the sixth-grade students created that frequently mentioned the best experience of their elementary school career was the Pioneer Day two years prior. Students selected their favorite memory to publicize. Students had many good memories from the kindergarten to sixth grade building on each other from year to year – to reflect two years back from sixth grade to fourth grade as the outstanding experience of elementary school is a high complement. Retrospectively the students remembered and valued their participation in the theme day experience. Students use their problem-solving skills to decide what they share.

After the event, students wrote six to eight thank you notes to the parents. The students got to select whom they wanted to thank, and since there were about sixty volunteers each volunteer received about a dozen letters. Students made decisions about who they wanted to thank and why they were the most important people who should get notes from them. The student may have had a lot of fun, but they needed to understand how much work it took from many people to make it occur. In another form of alternative assessment people came from around the region to observe the organization of Pioneer Day.

Conclusions

Volunteers are an important part for the execution of experiential learning in elementary schools. Students witness volunteers modeling civic participation in schools and communities. Volunteers work in first person historical presentation, historical reenactment, and in preventing school violence (Morris, 2001, Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Volunteers may be familiar to the students from the community or they may become familiar to the students from their work in the schools. Students see this connection between school and community provided mentors as an extension of their classroom into the community. Volunteers may act as mentors though the efficacy of mentorship as shown in research is inconclusive (Bernstein, Rappaport, Olsho, Hunt, & Levin, 2009). Volunteers may help create a ritual as part of a culminating activity where members of the school community expect to participate. Both the community and the school find experiential learning and come to expect the social studies celebration of the significance of antebellum life. This anticipated ritual signals that students are concluding an important aspect of state and local history required by their curriculum.

Experiential learning instruction and methodology impacted student learning when Mrs. Carr was successful in creating a group of parents willing and able to volunteer for her grade level. She got parents to respond for multiple years creating a memorable school tradition. She organized them to provide meaningful experience for her students and managed to help the students engage in social studies themed experiences at the school. This experience helped students

interpret their fourth-grade social studies curriculum. Further, this helped the students to engage in civics experiences as they looked at life in a pioneer family and community.

Ritual was important for students because it provides a footing for students to find security while reaching out into the unsteady waters of civic disagreement. Pioneer Day experiences helped to cover the related content in a meaningful and dynamic way when it helped them maintain their connection to the community. Despite conflict or disagreement students were able to find their way back to a sense of belonging if they experienced a sense of alienation. Ritual was an important part of the school year for many students, it anchored them in time and space and gave a structure to the events of the day. This activity was also a critical piece of building community. Other rituals existed within the class for celebrations, sharing a meal together, and opening and closing the instructional day. These rituals provided the students with a sense of belonging and all students felt secure in knowing their role within the classroom community. Amber said, "Playing the role of a pioneer student helped me appreciate life's benefits today."

Students were in a self-contained classroom in where they collaborated to develop a democratic classroom community. Mrs. Carr began the work of establishing a democratic classroom on the first day of school and continued to guide her students in learning the skills of democracy throughout the school year. Some students came to the classroom with skills in democratic citizenship. Others needed to learn these skills or needed to have these skills reawakened after experiencing a more authoritarian style of teaching. To foster a climate of democracy, Mrs. Carr and the students engaged in the use of ritual; practiced asking and responding to open ended questions; and used negotiation skills as part of living and working with one another in their classroom while using experiential learning.

Students encountered experiential learning when they used negotiation skills. Democratic classrooms provided students with opportunities to develop skills of negotiation and compromise. The students had a limited amount of time to decide and within that time they had to compromise. Some groups were able to reach consensus, but consensus seeking was messy. Sometimes students felt that voting was more expedient than finding a true consensus, but even though they did not reach a consensus, they could all live with their decisions.

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